

HOW TO PURSUE PEACE WITH ONE ANOTHER, PART II EPHESIANS 4:31–32

INTRODUCTION

Last Sunday we studied **verse 31** in which Paul focussed on the **sins that break peace** and bring conflict into our relationships.

Conflicts are in **inevitable reality** in our relationships because we are fallen sinners living with other fallen sinners in a fallen world.

Paul's instruction in **verse 31** certainly helped us gain a more realistic view of our relationships as he used **six terms, or six "peace-breakers"** as we called them, to describe the **sin that we inject** into our disagreements, turning them into sinful and painful conflicts.

We learnt that the six peace-breakers can be grouped together into **two larger categories** of anger and malice.

Like a wise and experienced Biblical counsellor,

Paul wanted to make sure that none of us failed to recognise our sin that contributes to the conflicts marring our relationships.

We might easily think that he was describing the **"other person,"** whether our spouse or our child, our friend or our family member, or even our fellow church member, if he had simply noted the broad categories of anger and malice.

By using so many terms, Paul helped us see that anger and malice come in various forms, but it is *every kind of anger* and *every kind of malice* that will damage or even destroy our relationships.

You might not blow up in the **white-hot rage of “anger,”** but the **frigid cold of your “wrath”** is just as sinful and just as destructive to the peace that ought to characterise your relationships.

As Paul made it crystal clear, **we are all guilty of being “peace breakers” instead of being the “peace makers” that God wants us to be.**

Even though we focussed only on the negative instruction of the sins that break peace, we were certainly **not left hopeless or helpless.**

We learnt that God calls His children to be peace makers who **“pursue peace with all men”** as **Hebrew 12:18** says, and that He has given us a **practical plan to pursue peace with one another.**

As we sought to apply Paul’s instruction, we were able to discover the **first two steps in God’s plan** for pursuing peace

STEP ONE in pursuing peace with one another is **being slow to take offence.**

Just like Tom and Emma needed to learn in their new marriage, **the best way to deal with conflict is to avoid it.**

There is no need to turn our disagreements into conflicts by responding to them with sin.

So when you have a disagreement with someone else, or even when they offend you in a minor way, the best path to pursuing peace is to overlook the offence.

Paul described **STEP ONE** in **Ephesians 4:2** as being humble, gentle, and patient, “**bearing with one another in love.**”

STEP TWO in pursuing peace is **dealing with your own sin.**

That means confessing and forsaking your sin, especially the anger and malice that turned a normal disagreement into a sinful conflict, in what the Bible calls “**repentance.**”

It is this step that Paul referred to in **verse 31** as “**putting away**” our relational sin against one another.

As Paul’s instruction echoed Jesus’ instruction in **Matthew 7:3–5**, we learnt that even when the other person has sinned against us, **we must prioritise dealing with our sin first.**

God makes dealing with your own sin the priority over dealing with the other person’s sin.

Regardless of who started the conflict, regardless of who first sinned, you must deal with your own sin first.

That was precisely what helped Jim and Kevin overcome their conflict that had been prolonged and escalated by their focus on the other person's sin.

They were caught in a deadlock, a “sin death spiral,” that threatened to destroy their relationship and divide their local church, until they learnt to prioritise their own sin and approach the other to confessing their sin and seek the other's forgiveness.

It wasn't easy though, and both friends needed the help of their elders to counsel them through the process of seeking forgiveness.

For some of you, **this may actually be one of the hardest steps in pursuing peace.**

This may be where you struggle most as you seek to repair the relationship and reconcile with someone in your family, with your friend, or with your fellow church member.

Regardless of how easily this step comes to you,
it is certainly not the end of the process.

The first two steps deal primarily with putting away the “**peace breakers,**”

but we must go further and put on the “**peace makers**” that **build the relational flourishing** which is the Biblical concept of peace.

PROPOSITION

As we continue in our study of **Ephesians 4:31–32**, we continue to follow Paul's instruction **in order to discover the practical steps to pursuing peace with one another.**

As a believer, you are **called to be a peacemaker.**

Your relationship with Christ should make you more peaceable with your family, friends, and especially within your local church.

Therefore, God has given us a practical plan to pursue peace with one another.

Having covered **steps one and two**, we'll continue to **add the practical steps** that we can distill from Paul's instruction.

With that, we come to **STEP THREE** as we move from **verse 31** to **verse 32.**

2. THE STEPS TO MAKE PEACE (32)

STEP THREE in God's plan for pursuing peace with one another is seeking forgiveness from the other person.

Paul doesn't explicitly deal with this step in **verse 32**, but it is **certainly implied by the other steps** that he describes

and it is a **vital step that transitions** from focussing on the **sins that break peace** to the **steps that make the peace** in our relationships.

STEP THREE is closely linked with **STEP TWO**, but the focus of **STEP TWO** is our **repentance and forgiveness from God**.

STEP THREE, then, is focussed on **seeking the forgiveness of others**.

In other words, we need to understand that our **relational sins always have a vertical and a horizontal component to them**.

So we deal with our relational sins, **first, by confessing and repenting** of our sin against God, seeking His forgiveness, and then, **second, by confessing** our sin to others and seeking their forgiveness.

In dealing with your relational sin, **it's helpful to begin** with the **vertical part** first.

That's because, as we have already learnt, your sin is against God before it is against another.

It's also because once you have confessed your sins to God and received His forgiveness,

you can seek His help to deal with the **horizontal part** of dealing with your sin.

Going to God before going to another was the key that unlocked Tom's ability to effectively pursue peace with Emma.

He had understood his pastor's counsel that he needed to seek Emma's forgiveness in order to resolve their conflicts, but he often struggled to do that well and sometimes he would even plunge them into another round of conflict because he did it so poorly.

When he went to God first to confess and seek His forgiveness, Tom then also knew that he could ask for God's help to approach Emma well.

Armed with the assurance of God's forgiveness of his sin, and confident that God would give him the grace he needed to seek Emma's forgiveness and resolve their conflict well, Tom found that they were resolving their conflict far more effectively.

This is another step that many of us struggle with.

When we go to someone we've hurt in order to apologise, we often make a mess of it.

As we struggle, we often **prolong the restoration of peace** and the **enjoyment of harmony** with one another.

A greeting card humorously pointed out this common struggle.

The front of the card had the words **"I'm so sorry, but..."** printed boldly across the top.

Below that was a list with checkmark boxes:

- you provoked me.
- it was actually your fault.
- I didn't mean it.
- I was having a bad day.
- the timing was off.
- you're wrong.
- you're annoying.
- you need help.
- I just can't help myself.
- I had a bad childhood.
- the stars were crossed.
- Mercury was in retrograde.
- I'm an addict.

The bottom of the front read, **"Instructions: Check all that apply."**

Then inside the card it said, **"I hope you'll accept such a sincere apology."**

As much as that card is poking fun at our miserable attempts to seek forgiveness,

we've all made a mess of apologising by **adding excuses that subtly argue that the conflict wasn't our fault** and sometimes even point the finger of blame to the other person.

Thankfully, **God gives us a better way to reconcile with those we have hurt.**

In God's plan for pursuing peace with one another,

STEP THREE of seeking forgiveness from the other person follows **STEP TWO** of dealing with your own sin

because then you will be able to humbly admit where you were wrong and confess your sin that damaged the relationship.

As we saw last week, it's very important for us to define the terms that we're using.

So let's define "apologise" and "seek forgiveness."

To apologise originally meant **"to make a defensive argument."**

In other words, the word apology was used to describe you defending your actions.

When we really make a mess of **STEP THREE**, **we "apologise"** but really use our words to argue that it's not our fault, and if anyone is to blame, it's actually the other person—

that's the greeting card apology.

To be fair, most often that's not what we mean when we talk about "apologising."

We mean that we are expressing regret for something that we did wrong.

Even then, apologising is something that we should use only **when we make a mistake, not when we sin.**

You can apologise to your spouse for accidentally breaking their favourite coffee mug, but you're going to have to do more if you throw it across the room in a fit of rage.

When we apologise, we use the words, **"I'm sorry,"** but when we seek forgiveness, we use the words, **"Please forgive me."**

As **Jay Adams** argues, "*Apologising is the world's inadequate substitute for biblical confession and forgiveness.*"¹

He continues, "*[It] does not complete the task of settling matters between conflicting parties. For one thing, God is not involved in the transaction; apologising has only a horizontal dimension. Moreover, there is neither a request for forgiveness from the offender nor any promise of forgiveness from the one offended.*"²

So then, **how do we define seeking forgiveness?**

¹ Jay E. Adams, *How to Help People in Conflict: Becoming a Biblical Peacemaker* (Cordova, TN: Institute for Nouthetic Studies, 2020), 122.

² Jay E. Adams, "Apology," *The Practical Encyclopedia of Christian Counseling* (Cordova, TN: Institute for Nouthetic Studies, 2020), 9.

Seeking forgiveness acknowledges that sin has been committed for which you are responsible, without diminishing the gravity of the sin or trying to shift the blame for it.

Furthermore, seeking forgiveness expresses **remorse for both the sin and its consequences,**

including damaging the relationship and hurting the other person, and expresses a desire to receive their forgiveness.

In short, **STEP THREE** of seeking forgiveness **includes both your confession of sin and your request to be forgiven.**

We so often make a mess of it, but this is often the step that is **the turning point** in pursuing peace and reconciling with someone else.

We can do it poorly, like when we “apologise,” **we can do it well,** when we ask for forgiveness, or **we can do it excellently** by admitting our sin, acknowledging the hurt we’ve caused and then asking forgiveness for both our sin and its consequences.

This was an area where Tom and Emma really struggled, especially after some of their more damaging conflicts.

After a year of marriage, Tom had burned Emma enough times with his explosive anger and cutting words, and she had iced him out often enough with her emotional distance and slanderous complaints about him to her mother, that the two of them sat in their pastor’s office wondering if there was any hope for their marriage.

Though they loved one another deeply—more than anyone else—they had not counted on how they could also hurt one another deeply—more than anyone else.

After a few weeks of Biblical counselling, they'd learnt to practice the first two steps, but it was the third step that really helped them to effectively resolve their conflicts and restore peace to their marriage.

Emma had learnt to admit her sin and avoid using words like “if,” “but,” and “maybe” when she sought Tom's forgiveness.

Previously, Emma would try to reconcile with Tom by saying, “*I'm sorry if I hurt you.*”

However, what Tom thought when she said that was, “*If? What do you mean 'if you hurt me'? If? Don't you know that you hurt me?*”

It's a lesson that we all need to learn, **because “if” confessions really say this:** “*I don't know how I hurt you, and I really don't care to know. And since I don't know what I did, I will probably do it again. But if you are going to be so whiny and hypersensitive that we can't go forward in our relationship until I say 'I'm sorry,' then, well, I'm sorry. Okay?*”³

³ Jones, *Pursuing Peace*, 96.

Tom had also learnt to acknowledge the hurt he'd caused Emma when he sinned against her in their conflicts.

In the past, Tom had asked for her forgiveness, but he focussed exclusively on his sin and ignored the effect of his sin on his wife.

His pastor helped him see that he also needed to express sorrow for the way his sin has made life hard for Emma.

Once he understood that he needed to take responsibility for both his sin and its consequences, he could see that his sin genuinely affected Emma by hurting her, and that a wise confession should feel that hurt and convey that regret.

Just like we need to, Tom eventually learnt not just to practice STEP THREE well, but to seek Emma's forgiveness excellently.

Previously he'd offer a good confession like: "I'm sorry, Emma, for yelling at you. I was wrong. Will you please forgive me?"

Soon though, he was doing much better:

"I'm sorry, Emma, for my anger as I yelled at you. It was sinful and wrong. And on top of that, I know I hurt you and embarrassed you in front of our friends. Will you please forgive me?"

After discovering the **first three steps** in God's plan for pursuing peace with one another, let's focus on Paul's instruction in **verse 32**.

Verse 32 follows the **paradigm for sanctification** that Paul laid out in greater detail in **chapter 4**.

As Paul explained in **verses 22–24**, we need to put off our sin, be renewed in our minds, and then put on righteousness.

Verses 31–32 follow this pattern as Paul **summarises the whole chapter in these two verses**.

Verse 31 describes the **sins that break peace**—that is what you need to put off.

Verse 32 describes the **steps that make peace**—that is what you need to put on.

³² Instead, be kind to one another, tender-hearted, graciously forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has graciously forgiven you.

Notice the contrast between the sinful anger and malice of **verse 31** which are **self-focussed** and the righteousness of **verse 32** which is **focussed on others**.

We see that in Paul's exhortation to "**Instead, be kind to one another, tender-hearted.**"

The term “**kind**” refers to loving benevolence toward others, that is, a loving desire to do good to others.⁴

It refers to our “*love that reaches out to others in gentle care and concern.*”⁵

As **one author** described it, “*Kindness means showing mercy and doing good even to people who do not deserve it or who deserve the opposite.*”⁶

The term “**tender-hearted**” can also be translated as “**compassionate**,” and it refers to the desire to help others.

“*Compassion is that inward, deeply felt emotional response of pity for a suffering person, coupled with a desire to alleviate that suffering.*”⁷

It’s easy to understand how the tender-heartedness towards others goes hand in hand with the kindness that seeks to help the other person and do them good.

Taken together, these two terms describe a loving effort to serve the good of the other person.

From this, we discover **STEP FOUR** to pursuing peace with one another—**you must serve the other person’s good.**

⁴ BDAG.

⁵ Adams, “Kindness,” *The Practical Encyclopedia of Christian Counseling*, 117.

⁶ Jones, *Pursuing Peace*, 112.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 110.

We can do that because God does that not only for us,
but even for His enemies.

**Psalm 145:9—Yahweh is good to all, / And His compassions
are over all His works.**

After months of brutal conflict, Jim and Kevin had a lot of work to do in order to rebuild their friendship.

When they shifted from focussing on themselves to focusing on doing good to one another, they found that despite the damage from their conflict, they were able to restore their friendship through their loving service of one another.

Jim didn't know that even though Kevin's kids seemed to do no wrong, Kevin and his wife Pam had been under tremendous stress after the doctors had flagged some concerning results on Pam's recent physical.

Shortly after Jim and Kevin had started their counselling with the elders, Pam had received the news they had been dreading—she had been diagnosed with cancer.

Despite their conflict, Jim immediately focussed on what he and his family could do to serve their dear friends.

Looking back, Kevin would come to say that their friendship was restored through all the acts of service as Jim and his family helped them through countless doctors visits and chemo treatments.

As you pursue peace, **an important way** in which you need to respond with kindness and compassion is by **recognising that the other person's sin is not only against you, but is against God.**

Just as when you deal with your own sin you need to recognise both a **vertical and horizontal component**, so too when you consider the other person's sin—

you need to recognise that there is both a vertical and horizontal component.

We often focus exclusively on the horizontal—the sin against us.

However, you need to recognise that that the dysfunctional relationship with us is symptomatic of the other person's dysfunctional relationship with God.

When you understand that the person you have conflict with has a sin problem in their relationship with God, it should trigger a desire to help them resolve it.

This understanding will help you **not to take the offence personally** and to realise that you can serve the other person with kindness and tender-heartedness.

Serving the other person's good, then, is a very broad and practical step, **but it should always include doing whatever we can to help the other person reconcile not only with us, but with God.**

What that involves more often than not is the loving act of **confrontation.**

Now it's **critically important** that whenever loving confrontation is needed as you serve the other person's good, that you only take such an action after dealing with **STEPS TWO AND THREE** of dealing with your own sin and seeking the other person's forgiveness.

In fact, Jesus' instructions in **Matthew 7** that we looked at last Sunday actually include the **loving act of confrontation**.

Though Jesus clearly tells you to prioritise your sin, once you have dealt with it Biblically you will be in a position to lovingly serve the other person as you help them see their sin and need for repentance.

Matthew 7:5—**First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.**

Paul described how to lovingly serve others through gracious confrontation in **Galatians 6:1**—

1 Brothers, even if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, each of you looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

As **Robert Jones** writes—*“When the offender struggles with sins he cannot overcome, then confrontation coupled with counsel, encouragement, or accountability demonstrates Christlike love.”*⁸

⁸ Jones, *Pursuing Peace*, 156.

Look back at **verse 31**—after calling for a replacement of self-focus with a focus on others and their needs to which we must respond with kindness and compassion,

Paul continues to explain the most important way in which you should serve the other person's good—**graciously forgiving each other**.

This is also then **STEP FIVE** in God's plan for pursuing peace with one another—**forgive the other person**.

Paul uses a word here that normally has a **broader meaning** than “to forgive one another.”

It can also be translated as **“to be gracious to one another.”**

It's the same word for grace that the NT uses for God's grace to us who are in Christ.

This concept of grace is broader than forgiveness but it does, of course, include forgiveness.

Most translations choose the narrower meaning of “forgiveness” because that is how Paul frequently uses it, but as you can see from the way the Legacy Standard Bible renders it as **“graciously forgiving”** we actually don't need to choose between the two meanings.

Paul's concern in this context is clearly on forgiveness, but it is forgiveness that comes from a larger response of grace to others.

In fact, graciousness **sums up everything** that we need to “put on” **“instead”** of our self-centred sin.

As commentator **Harold Hoehner** writes, “*Graciousness is the antithesis of bitterness, anger, wrath, shouting and abusive speech.*”⁹

In other words, bitterness, anger, and wrath are counteracted by a gracious attitude, while shouting and slander are counteracted by gracious speech.

This grace is obviously essential to sincerely serving the other person’s good.

There is nothing more gracious, though, than forgiving one another.

Forgiveness is the most important way you respond to one another with kindness and compassion.

Paul’s comparison between our forgiveness and God’s makes it clear that **forgiveness is the primary form** of this graciousness that he has in mind.

So then, **STEP FOUR** of **serving the other person’s good** naturally brings us to **STEP FIVE** of **forgiving the other person**.

As I said last week, **we need to be slow to take offence and quick to forgive.**

Often, though, **we do the opposite** as we bring conflict into our relationships by being quick to take offence and slow to forgive.

⁹ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 640.

It is crucial that we understand Biblical forgiveness.

Once again, we need to **define our terms** if we're going to understand God's plan for pruning peace with one another.

“Forgiveness is a three-fold promise. When you forgive someone, you absorb the cost of the offence committed against you. You cancel the debt, and when you do, you make a three-fold promise”¹⁰—

- ‘I will not bring up this offence again or use it against you.’
- ‘I will not bring it up to others in gossip, or malign you because of it.’
- ‘I will not bring it up to myself and dwell on this offence.’

As **Jay Adams** writes, *“When all else is removed, at bottom forgiveness is a promise. Like God, whose forgiveness is our model, when we forgive we go on record as promising not to remember one’s sins against him any more. That means that we will neither bring it up nor use it against him. We promise not to bring it up to him, to others, or to ourselves.”¹¹*

So clearly, then, forgiveness is not a feeling.

¹⁰ Timothy S. Lane, *Forgiving Others*.

¹¹ Adams, “Forgiveness,” *The Practical Encyclopedia of Christian Counseling*, 83.

That small nugget of Biblical truth helped Emma to pursue peace with Tom.

She struggled to be quick to forgive because she confused forgiveness with *feeling* peaceful and affectionate towards Tom.

She didn't think she could forgive Tom until her *feelings* settled down from the turmoil of their conflict, but she found it a lot easier to forgive him when she understood that she was making a promise.

She learnt to let her feelings follow her forgiveness, not her forgiveness follow her feelings.

Now, as we consider Paul's exhortation to "**forgive each other**," and **our application of that instruction** to **STEP FIVE** of the plan to pursue peace with one another, I would like to **address one of the most common questions**—

Should I forgive someone who is unrepentant? Does God command me to forgive the person who sinned against me, even if they have not asked for forgiveness?

We find the answer to that question in **the two kinds of forgiveness that the Bible describes.**

We can use various names, but the first kind of forgiveness is **attitudinal or dispositional forgiveness.** It's the forgiveness that takes place in our hearts.

The second kind is **transactional or relational forgiveness**. It's the forgiveness that takes place when we promise another that we will grant their request for forgiveness.

We find the first kind of forgiveness—attitudinal forgiveness—commanded by Jesus in **Mark 11:25**—

²⁵ Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions.

This kind of forgiveness has a vertical focus since it is between you and God. **It's internal; it's in your heart.**

The purpose of this attitudinal forgiveness is to release bitterness from your heart.

As such, it is **unconditional forgiveness** that is independent of the other person's repentance.

We find the second kind of forgiveness—transactional forgiveness—commanded by Jesus in **Luke 17:3-4**—

³ If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.

⁴ And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him."

This kind of forgiveness has a horizontal focus since it is between you and the offender. **It's relational; it's granted to another.**

The purpose of this attitudinal forgiveness is to reconcile and restore your relationship.

As such, it is **conditional forgiveness** that is dependent on the other person's repentance.

This distinction is what helped Jim and Kevin's families to reconcile.

What neither of the two friends took into account initially was that as their conflict escalated, so too did the hurt they inflicted on one another's families.

Knowing the difference between the two kinds of forgiveness was especially helpful to Kevin's wife Pam who had been deeply hurt by Jim's slanderous accusations that he had spread through the church about her husband.

It took months after reconciling with Kevin before Jim was convicted of his need to seek Pam's forgiveness.

However, she was able to avoid filling her heart with bitterness towards him because she had long before made the commitment to God to forgive him.

When Jim did repent and ask her forgiveness, Pam was delighted to grant it as the forgiveness was completed or formally transacted.

As you pursue peace with one another, God's plan includes forgiving the other person.

When they repent and seek your forgiveness, you need to forgive with both kinds of forgiveness as you grant their request and promise not to bring it up to them, to others, or to ourselves.

However, as we all know, sometimes the other person doesn't repent.

Sometimes they don't see the need to seek our forgiveness. What then?

You still need to forgive, though your forgiveness will be a heart-type forgiveness that commits before God to a forgiving attitude while you wait.

Even when that repentance and request for forgiveness never comes, **attitudinal forgiveness ensures that you are not sinning by cultivating bitterness in your heart or pursuing malice as you try to hurt them back.**

3. THE STANDARD TO MEASURE PEACE (32)

Paul ends this verse with **the most important element of all.**

As children of God, we are called to be peacemakers, but it is only possible for us to pursue peace with one another **because the God of peace has first pursued peace with us.**

³² ... **graciously forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has graciously forgiven you.**

Paul draws a **comparison** between the forgiveness we grant others and the forgiveness we have from God, in Christ.

As Paul exhorts us to pursue peace, he uses God's peace with us in Christ as **the measure for our peace with one another.**

Paul uses our forgiveness from God as the standard of our forgiveness for others.

One implication of this comparison is that you must forgive those who sin against you, **first**, with attitudinal forgiveness, and, **second**, with transactional forgiveness when they seek it.

That's true even when we have **doubts about the genuineness** of the other person's repentance, as Jesus made explicit in **Luke 17:4**—

⁴ “And if [your brother] sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”

We forgive others because regardless of how severe their sin against us was, we know that our sin against God was far worse.

That's the point of **Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant** in **Matthew 18**. No matter how much you have been sinned against, your sin against God is greater.

Since God forgive you the greater debt of your sin, you must forgive others the smaller debt of their sin against you.

As **John MacArthur** wrote, “For a Christian to be wilfully unforgiving is unthinkable. We who have been forgiven by God Himself have no right to withhold forgiveness from our fellow sinners.”¹²

The other implication of Paul’s comparison between God’s forgiveness and ours is that forgiveness is a means to a greater end—a restored relationship.

As **Joel James** states—“God did not dismiss those He forgave with a cold stare. He blessed them. He loved them. He made His relationship with them new and better.”¹³

As we apply this, we discover **STEP SIX** in God’s plan—you must restore and renew the relationship.

In fact, Paul makes this point himself in the next verses, **Ephesians 5:1-2**—

- 1 **Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children,**
- 2 **and walk in love...**

Tom and Emma put a lot of effort into STEP SIX as they learnt to implement God’s plan for pursuing peace into their marriage.

After a rocky start to their first year together, they soon learnt to cultivate greater love, intimacy, and companionship in their marriage through effective peacemaking.

¹² John F. MacArthur, *The Freedom and Power of Forgiveness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 97.

¹³ Joel James, *Forgiving Like God Forgives*, 17.

Emma noticed the change in Tom who had always taken efforts to apologise or ask her forgiveness, but as he understood that the standard by which he should measure his efforts was God's peacemaking efforts with him, he started to put a lot of work into restoring and renewing their relationship after a conflict.

As Emma reflected on the change in her husband, she finally understood what their counsellor had told them in their first session, that conflicts are opportunities to love and serve one another.

Conflicts were still painful, but Tom always made sure that they did more than establish "ceasefire" that left them cold and distant from one another. He made sure not to end his peacemaking efforts with Emma until their relationship was in better shape than before.

A **restored and renewed relationship** is the goal of our peacemaking efforts, but sometimes that is **just not possible**.

That's why Paul wrote in **Romans 12:18**, "**if possible, so far as it depends on you, being at peace with all men.**"

STEP SIX is only possible when both you and the other person are pursuing peace, but when there is a lack of repentance there can be no completed, transactional forgiveness.

Without that, the relationship remains damaged or even destroyed as a painful consequence of sin—at least until the God of peace intervenes to bring both parties to repentance as they pursue peace with one another.

CONCLUSION

As Paul wrote **verses 31–32**, he intended them to summarise and complete his exhortation of all **chapter 4**.

It's no surprise, then, that these two short verses contain so much instruction in how to pursue peace with one another.

Paul taught us about **the sins that break peace, the steps to make peace, and the standard to measure peace**.

As we discovered, **we can apply Paul's instructions through six practical steps** to pursue peace with one another.

STEP ONE is being slow to take offence—the best way to deal with conflict is to avoid it in the first place by overlooking differences and minor offences.

STEP TWO is dealing with your own sin. That means repenting of your sin as you forsake it and seek forgiveness, first from God and then from the other person.

STEP THREE is seeking the other person's forgiveness. If you do it God's way, then you won't offer a substandard apology by saying, "I'm sorry." Rather you will confess your sin and ask for forgiveness with the words, "Please forgive me."

STEP FOUR is serving the other person's good. That is, you will replace your self-focus with a focus on the other person's good as you treat them with kindness and compassion.

STEP FIVE is forgiving the other person. That means understanding forgiveness not as a feeling, but as a promise not to bring another's sin up to them, to others, or to yourself again.

STEP SIX is restoring and renewing the relationship. You will not be finished in your goal of peace until you have made the relationship new and better.

Though conflicts are an inevitable reality in your relationships, as you practice God's plan for pursuing peace with one another, **you will find yourself experiencing less pain and enjoying more peace in your relationships** with family, friends, and fellow believers.

BENEDICTION

Now the God who is mighty,
the Lamb who is worthy,
and the Spirit who is near,
fortify you to live faithfully in these days
and all the days until Jesus comes.
Amen.¹⁴

¹⁴ Dale Ralph Davis, *Grace Be with You: Benedictions from Dale Ralph Davis*, New Edition. (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2019), 43.